

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 0499

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, JO, EG, SY, XF

SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER - RELATIONS WITH EGYPT,
SYRIA AND NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY: RIFAI SAID THAT IN RECENT CONTACTS WITH SYRIA, JORDANIANS HAD EXPLAINED PRESENT SADAT POSITION, ESPECIALLY THEIR FEARS THAT SADAT WOULD LIKE TO SEE A WAR BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL IN ORDER TO FREE HIM (SADAT) TO MAKE A NEXT DISENGAGEMENT STEP. ASAD APPARENTLY AGREED WITH JORDANIANS TO OFFER ISRAELIS NO PROVOCATIONS OR OPPORTUNITIES TO HIT SYRIA. RIFAI SAID JORDANIANS URGED EXTENSION OF UNDOF MANDATE IN MAY WITHOUT A FUSS, AND NOTED THAT PROBLEM WAS TO GET THROUGH THE CURRENT YEAR WITHOUT A WAR. RIFAI'S UNCLE TELLS ME SYRIANS ARE THINKING ABOUT ANOTHER SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION BEFORE MAY UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL. RIFAI ALSO SAID IT IS HIS ASSESSMENT THAT EGYPT WANTS TO PUSH JORDAN FORWARD IN A DISENGAGEMENT STEP ON WEST BANK AS A DEVICE TO REDUCE ARAB CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION SHOULD EGYPT THEN BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE A THIRD STEP FOR ITSELF IN SINAI. RIFAI SAYS THIS IS ABSOLUTE NON-STARTER WITH JORDAN. ONLY CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH JORDAN WOULD AGREE TO NEGOTIATE WOULD BE FULL RETURN OF WEST BANK AND JERUSALEM AND THAT IS ALSO NON-STARTER. RIFAI SAYS US VETO IN UNSC HAS ENDED POSSIBILITY OF SYRIAN PARTICIPATION IN GENEVA AND HAS BEGUN RE-POLARIZATION OF SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST, PARTICULARLY HE IS AFRAID OF ALIENTAION OF ASAD. RIFAI DISTRUSTS OUR COMMITMENTS TO DO SOMETHING AFTER THE VETO. JORDANIAN - EGYPTIAN RELATIONS WILL CONTINUE BAD. KING HAS SENT A LETTER BACK TO SADAT REBUTTING SADAT'S STATEMENTS IN HIS LETTER TO KING. KING WILL NOT BUDGE

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ON ACCEPTING NEW EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR. RIFAI HOPES TO GET SAUDI

HELP THIS WEEKEND WITH EGYPTIANS. IN LONG RUN HE SAYS JUST AS JORDAN WILL NOT ACCEPT SYRIAN MINILTARY COMMAND, SO TOO IT WILL NOT ACCEPT EGYPTIAN POLITICAL DOMINATION. END SUMMARY.

1. I SAW RIFAI FOR A TALK ON JANUARY 28. I ASKED WHAT HAD DEVELOPED IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH EGYPT. RIFAI SAID THAT REPLY TO SADAT'S LETTER HAD BEEN SENT TO CAIRO YESTERDAY. FROM WHAT RIFAI TOLD ME IT WAS AN EFFORT IN DETAIL TO COUNTERACT THE SADAT LETTER AND WAS, LIKE THE SADAT LETTER TO HUSSEIN, DRAFTED FOR PUBLICATION.

2. RIFAI SAID THAT HIS TWO EMISSARIES (TALHOUNI AND HIS UNCLE ABDUL MUNIEM RIFAI) HAD RETURNED FROM THEIR TRIP TO DAMASCUS VERY HEARTENED BY THEIR TALK WITH ASAD AND BY HIS GENERAL ATTITUDE. RIFAI SAID THAT JORDANIANS BRIEFED ASAD ON THEIR MEETING WITH SADAT, INCLUDING SADAT'S STATEMENTS ABOUT PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. RIFAI LAID SPECIAL STRESS ON HIS CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF EGYPTIAN THINKING WHICH IS THAT SADAT NEEDS TO DEVELOP ONE OF FOLLOWING PRECONDITIONS BEFORE PROCEEDING AHEAD WITH ANOTHER STEP, EITHER AT GENEVA OR ELSEWHERE. (RIFAI ADDS THAT HE BELIEVES SADAT IS SERIOUS ABOUT TRYING FOR ANOTHER STEP BEFORE THE US ELECTIONS). PRECONDITIONS, SAYS RIFAI ARE EITHER: (A) A WAR BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL IN WHICH ISRAELIS NEUTRALIZE SYRIANS MILITARILY (AND THUS POLITICALLY) AND LEAVE EGYPT FREE TO GO AHEAD WITHOUT ARAB OPPOSITION, OR (B) HAVING JORDAN ATTEND GENEVA OR OTHERWISE TO GO AHEAD WITH A DISENGAGEMENT ON THE WEST BANK TO PROVIDE ARAB COMPANY AND COVER FOR A THIRD EGYPTIAN STEP.

3. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD WAS QUIET AND MODERATE AND AGREED WITH JORDANIANS THAT HE TAKE NO PRECIPITATE STEP WHICH WOULD GIVE THE ISRAELIS AN EXCUSE TO ATTACK HIM. JORDANIANS, RIFAI SAID, WERE PARTICULARLY STRONG IN URGING ASAD TO RENEW MANDATE IN MAY FOR GOLAN SO THAT ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE NO REASON TO ATTACK. (ABDUL MUNIEM RIFAI, WHOM I SAW SEPARATELY LAST EVENING CONFIRMED BASICALLY WHAT RIFAI TOLD ME, BUT ALSO ADDED THAT SYRIANS WERE CERTAINLY THINKING OF ANOTHER GO AROUND IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL BEFORE THE MAY UNDOF RENEWAL. HE DID NOT SAY, BUT I ASSUMED SYRIANS WOULD TRY TO IMPROVE THEIR LEVERAGE ON US, KNOWING THAT WE WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO VETO RENEWAL, IN HOPES THAT THEY MAY GET SOMETHING MORE FOR THE PALESTINIANS. IM POINTED OUT TO THE ELDER RIFAI THE GREAT DANGERS INHERENT IN SUCH AN EFFORT, SINCE THE REMOVAL

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OF UNDOF MIGHT WELL BE THE SYRIAN ACTION THAT SOME OF THE ISRAELIS WERE LOOKING FOR AS A PRETEXT FOR WAR).

4. RIFAI THEN COVERED THE SECOND POINT OF HIS ASSESSMENT, THAT EGYPT WAS PRESSURING JORDAN BECAUSE IT WANTED TO KEEP JORDAN WITH IT, POSSIBLY IN THE FORM OF SOME SORT OF WEST BANK DISENGAGEMENT EITHER AT GENEVA OR ELSEWHERE, SO THAT EGYPT WOULD THEN BE FREE (IN THE ARAB WORLD) TO GO AHEAD WITH ANOTHER SETP. RIFAI

THEN WENT ON TO SAY, AS HE HAD IN THE PAST, THAT RABAT HAD CHANGED EVERYTHING AND THAT JORDAN COULD NOT, SHORT OF A PUBLIC REVERSAL BY THE ARAB LEADERS OF RABAT, ENGAGE IN NEGOTIATIONS FOR A WEST BANK DISENGAGEMENT. THE ONE EXCEPTION WOULD BE IF ISRAELIS WOULD OFFER TO RETURN TO JORDAN FULL WEST BANK AND JERUSALEM. IF THEY DID THAT JORDAN WOULD GO AHEAD WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE OTHER ARABS, BUT THAT WAS CLEARLY A NON-STARTER. IN THE MEANTIME, JORDAN WOULD DO NOTHING TO TRY TO CHANGE RABAT OR PROCEED INDEPENDENTLY. THEY IN FACT COULD NOT DO THIS. OVER TIME THEY THOUGHT THERE WAS A REAL POSSIBILITY CONDITIONS MIGHT CHANGE IN THEIR FAVOR, BUT THEY COULD ONLY SIT TIGHT AND WAIT FOR THAT TO HAPPEN. BESIDES, IN THE SHORT TERM AND FOR THEM, RABAT WAS ONE OF THE "BEST THINGS THAT EVER HAPPENED TO US, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A DISASTER AS FAR AS REACHING AN OVERALL LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF PEACE IN THE AREA."

5. AS FAR AS GENEVA IS CONCERNED, RIFAI SAID THAT WITH THE US VETO, WHICH HAS PROVOKED A SHARP REACTION IN THE ARAB WORLD, "SYRIANS WILL NOT GO TO GENEVA." THEY WILL NOW ALSO BE EVEN MORE INSISTENT ON HAVING THE PLO THERE FROM THE START. (ON THIS POINT ABDUL MUNEIM RIFAI TOLD ME THAT WHEN HE WENT TO DAMASCUS EARLY IN JANUARY TO NEGOTIATE ON A UNSC RESOLUTION TEXT, JORDANIANS HAD WHITTLED DOWN THE SYRIAN TOUGH POSITION IN THE HOPE OF GETTING A US ABSTENTION ON WHATEVER RESOLUTION THE ARABS COULD AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES. THEY HAD ALSO GOTTEN ASAD TO AGREE, THAT IF THE AGREED ARAB RESOLUTION PASSED IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL (PRESUMABLY WITH A US ABSTENTION), THEN THEY (JORDAN AND SYRIA) WOULD GO TO GENEVA, INITIALLY WITHOUT THE PLO, AND BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS AT GENEVA THE PLO JOINING THE CONFERENCE AT A LATER POINT. I SAID THAT I HAD NOT HEARD THAT POINT MADE BEFORE. HE SAID THE JORDANIAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UN WAS TO HAVE TOLD US IN

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NEW YORK ABOUT IT IN THE CURSE OF NEGOTIATING THE FINAL TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION, AND THAT I HAD BEEN TOLD HERE THAT THEY SYRIANS WERE EXTREMELY MODERATE AND WILLING TO TRY TO WORK FOR US SUPPORT OR NON-OBJECTION ON A RESOLUTION. I REPLIED I HAD BEEN TOLD THE LATTER POINTS, BUT HAS NOT BEEN AWARE OF THE FORMER SPECIFICS ON WHAT ATTITUDE SYRIA AND JORDAN WERE PREPARED TO TAKE ON GENEVA, IF THE RESOLUTION HAS PASSED.)

6. PRIME MINISTER RIFAI SAYS THAT HE NOW SEES NO WAY THAT GENEVA CAN MEET AFTER THE US VETO. HE SAID HE IS AWARE OF US GOOD INTENTIONS ON THE QUESTION OF NEXT STEPS BUT DOES NOT TRUST THESE. HE SAID, "THERE IS AN OLD ARAB SAYING THAT IN THIS CASE HOLDS TRUE -- THE EXCUSE IS WORSE THAN THE ORIGINAL MISTAKE -- I.E. PROMISING TO DO SOMETHING CONCRETE AFTER THE VETO, BUT HAVING NOTHING APPEAR." I TOLD RIFAI, THAT AS I EXPLAINED TO HIM WHEN I HAD COME BACK FROM WASHINGTON, WE HAD SOME EFFORTS IN MIND AND THAT THE ARABS SHOULD NOT REACH HASTY CONCLUSIONS ON THIS SCORE. (IT IS CLEAR THAT PROMISES OF FUTURE ACTION WILL NOT HELP FOR LONG IN PREVENTING THE RE-POLARIZATION OF OUR RELATIONS IN THE AREA. RIFAI WAS PARTICULARLY STRONG IN HIS STATEMENTS ABOUT THE SYRIAN REACTION, AND LAMENTED WHAT HE TERMED WAS THE WASTE OF OUR PAST TWO YEAR EFFORT TO DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH ASAD IN PARTICULAR AND THE SYRIANS IN GENERAL.) I ASKED RIFAI ABOUT JORDAN'S CURRENT ATTITUDE ON GOING TO GENEVA. RIFAI SAID THAT JORDAN IS FLEXIBLE. IF THE OTHER ARABS GO AND WANT US TO GO AND WE SEE NO GREAT DISADVANTAGE IN GOING, WE WILL GO, EVEN IF ONLY TO TALK ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS IN THE SOUTH WITH THE ISRAELI BORDER FENCE. (RIFAI'S UNCLE MADE A SPECIAL EFFORT WITH ME ON THE QUESTION OF NOT
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LOSING CONTACT WITH ASAD AS A RESULT OF THE VETO. HE SAID THAT HE HOPED WE APPRECIATED WHAT A REFRESHING CHANGE ASAD HIMSELF WAS FROM THE RUN-OF-THE-MILL SYRIAN RULERS WITH WHICH WE HAD HAD TO DEAL IN THE PAST. I SAID HE COULD REST ASSURED THAT WE DID RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE AND THAT THE SECRETARY ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS IN MY HEARING HAD STATED HIS VERY GENUINE HIGH REGARD FOR PRESIDENT ASAD.

7. ELDER RIFAI ADDED SOME VIGNETTES FROM HIS CAIRO MEETING AND JORDANIAN POLICY TOWARD EGYPT. HE SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN AND REMAINS A STRONG SUPPORTER OF CLOSE JORDANIAN - EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. HE WAS DEEPLY DEPRESSED BY SADAT'S HIGHLY NERVOUS AND IRRITABLE STATE. HE WORKED HARD TO TRY TO CONVINCE SADAT THAT THERE WERE REAL ADVANTAGES TO EGYPT OF JORDAN'S CLOSER RELATIONS WITH SYRIA, INCLUDING THE CHANCE TO MODERATE SYRIAN VIEWS AND, CLOSER COORDINATION OF ARAB EFFORTS. SADAT TURNED IT ALL DOWN AND INSISTED HE WOULD GO HIS OWN WAY AND THAT IT WAS EITHER SYRIA

OR HIM. THE ELDER RIFAI SAID ALSO THAT HE HAD TRIED HARD TO GET THE KING AND HIS NEPHEW, THE PRIME MINISTER, TO ACCEPT AFTER A DECENT DELAY THE APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR HERE (OTHMAN NURI). HE SAID THAT NURI IS MORE SENIOR AND PROBABLY MORE CAPABLE THAN THE PRESENT EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR WHOM SADAT CALLS "THAT CHILDISH BOY". HE SAID ALSO THAT SADAT SEEMS GENUINELY CONVINCED THAT NURI WAS AN IMPROVEMENT AND WAS DESIGNED TO HELP RELATIONSHIPS. KING IS FIRMLY COMMITTED AGAINST NURI AND AFTER SEVEN TRIES WITH BOTH OF THEM (KING AND PRIME MINISTER), ELDER RIFAI HAS GIVEN UP TRYING TO GET THEM TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS -- THEIR MEMORIES OF NURI'S PRO-PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES IN 1970 ARE TOO STRONG. SADAT AGREED TO HOLD OFF WITHDRAWING THE PRESENT AMBASSADOR FOR A MONTH TO GIVE THE JORDANIANS MORE TIME.

8. PRIME MINISTER ENDED OUR MEETING ON JANUARY 28, BY TELLING ME THAT HE PLANS TO USE HIS VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1 TO TALK TO FAHD ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS WITH EGYPT. HE HOPES THAT WHEN SADAT GOES TO RIYADH, SAUDIS WILL TRY TO GIVE THEM A BETTER IMPRESSION OF JORDAN'S PRESENT APPROACH. RIFAI SUMMARIZED IT FOR ME BY SAYING THAT, "JUST AS WE WILL NEVER PUT OURSELVES UNDER SYRIAN MILITARY COMMAND OR CONTROL, SO TO THE EGYPTIANS WILL HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO PUT OURSELVES UNDER EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONTROL." IN THE LONG RUN HE ADDED, WE

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WILL LIE LOW AND TRY TO ACT WITH RESTRAINT AND HOPE THAT THE ISSUE WILL PASS OVER. WE ARE NOT READY TO KNUCKLE UNDER TO EGYPT. WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH THIS BEFORE WITH NASSER WHEN ALL THE OTHER ARABS SUPPORTED HIM AGAINST US, AND WE SURVIVED, BUT SADAT DOES NOT SEEM TO REMEMBER THAT.

9. RECOMMEND DEPARTMENT PASS CAIRO AND DAMASCUS.
PICKERING

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